College Radio Life; A Personal View

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It was the beginning of September, 1960 and my parents dropped me off at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The beginning of college life.

That fall I was chatting with a fellow freshman dorm member who told me he visited WLRN, the school's radio station, and got hired as a disc jockey. At that time Lehigh was an all male school which left a fair amount of time on a young man's schedule. This was further accentuated by me being a government major in a school full of engineers.

So, I ambled down to the basement of the University Center which housed the school's newspaper and radio station. Before I knew it, I was a popular music disc jockey using the name Bob Ford. On top of that they made me the Traffic Manager (a position nobody else wanted) and I scheduled all of the radio station's advertising and confirmed the air times of the spots to our sponsors.

That was my introduction to college radio. In my sophomore year I hosted a jazz show from 10:00-midnight called “Night Sounds.” I adopted a theme song from a Chet Baker album and looked for long album cuts so I could do a little studying while playing a 7-8 minute jazz number.

I met a fellow college radio enthusiast at the station named Fritz Kass. We both thought that college radio could be bigger and greater if it was nationally organized. We were aware that the Intercollegiate Broadcasting System at that time existed to represent and assist college radio stations. Although it provided valuable assistance to those stations in FCC representation, engineering advice and other areas, it did not seem to be exciting or to interact with local college stations to a great extent.

This led to Fritz and I birthing College Broadcasting Affiliates, a start-up organization headquartered at WLRN in Bethlehem, PA. Fritz and I went to work. First, we communicated with as many college radio stations as we could. We even visited a few. We started by making a limited number of programs available to stations. We gave engineering advice through our Chief Engineer, George Eustis. We started publishing a CBA newsletter which rapidly grew into a full-fledged magazine that was sent to college radio stations across the country and to others that served the industry.

We were fairly aggressive in marketing the organization and began signing up member stations at a rather rapid rate. Almost overnight we became competitors with IBS.

Towards the end of that school year in 1962, we received an invitation from IBS to come to Washington, DC to meet with the leaders of that organization. We were delighted to meet with George Abraham and David Borst who were the founders of IBS around 1940. We also met with Bill Malone, Dick Crompton and Herb Barlow, active IBS Board Members. We all hit it off and had a very productive meeting. At the end of our session, Fritz and I agreed to merge CBA with IBS and operate the national college radio organization out of our college in Bethlehem.

Fritz and I went to work. We recruited several other Lehigh students to work with us. We marketed the "new" IBS to college stations around the country. More and more colleges were launching stations and more and more were signing up to join IBS.

We expanded the College Radio Magazine and sold a modest amount of advertising. Articles included radio programming, engineering issues, FCC matters and sales and marketing for college radio. We received requests to send more copies of the magazine to each station. I must confess, that to make the organization look bigger, we often wrote articles under aliases.

IBS had created a Master Handbook which it gave to all members. However, some of it was outdated. So, we undertook a major rewrite of the programming, administration, sales, engineering and governmental sections of the Handbook to distribute to members. I rewrote the sales section.

We sought to expand the size and quality of the annual National Convention. In 1964 I was chairman of the convention held at WKCR at Columbia University. Our two keynote speakers were James Hagerty, a vice-president of ABC networks and former Press Secretary to President Dwight Eisenhower; and Robert Lee who was an FCC Commissioner. We had well-attended sessions cover almost every area of operating a college radio station. We also promoted a number of regional conventions held around the country.

We continued to represent college radio before the FCC. We obtained the rights to distribute a number of radio series to the college market. We also answered countless questions coming in from colleges, record promoters, equipment manufacturers and others about the college radio market.

It’s hard to believe that while doing all of this, Fritz and I remained active in running WLRN at Lehigh; starting a second carrier-current station, WLVR; promoting a college concert at a number of colleges with Nina Simone, Herbie Mann and others; and chartering two airplanes to Europe for the summer sending off students, faculty and guests from five area colleges. And occasionally we attended classes.

In June of 1964 Fritz and I graduated from college. Fritz enrolled in naval officers training school and served aboard a destroyer escort as ensign and then lieutenant jg off the coast of Vietnam. I took a safer route and enrolled at Syracuse law school. After his active duty naval service, Fritz continued to operate IBS from his business offices in upstate New York. Much of my law practice was in the television industry in New York City.